

# Kentucky AGRICULTURAL News

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PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID

## Equestrians ride for joy

### Horseback riding gives special kids exercise, confidence

By TED SLOAN

*Kentucky Agricultural News*

**T**he barrel races were somewhat slower than those you would see at a rodeo. But Logan Rovinski circled the barrels and streaked for the finish line with the enthusiasm of a cowboy.

"I'm doing it! I'm doing it! I'm doing it! I'm doing it!" he screamed over and over. Then: "Giddyap, boy! Giddyap, boy! Giddyap, boy! Giddyap, boy!"

Logan's face and those of the other riders at the Jordan's Gait Invitational shone as brightly as the late summer sun on a glorious September Saturday. Riders from three therapeutic riding stables for equestrians with special needs came together at Jordan's Gait Stables west of Elizabethtown for an event that resembled a family reunion more than a competition.

The riders relished their day in the sun – even Amber Pepin, who in the morning had to be pulled from her horse when it was momentarily spooked. Am-



*The faster Elizabeth Stickler's horse ran,  
the better she liked it.*



Photos by Ted Sloan

*Logan Rovinski urges his mount on as David Means leads the way at Jordan's Gait.*

ber got back on her horse that afternoon and earned a blue ribbon for her bravery.

Tim Martin, who is blind, stood tall in the saddle like the veteran rider that he is. Later, the personable teen-ager was more than happy to talk about the two blue ribbons he was taking home to Morgantown.

"There are days when I'll think, 'What were you thinking?'" said Debra Vincent, who operates Muhlenberg County Equestrian with her husband, Dicky. "Then I see the looks on the riders' faces. That's why I got into this."

"We want the kids to have fun and enjoy themselves," said David Means, who with his wife, Donna, operates Jordan's Gait from their home. "Everybody is going to come out a winner."

Volunteers lined horses and riders up for their events, walked alongside riders on horseback who needed assistance, announced the proceedings over the public address system, and performed other tasks to keep the show moving. Parents grilled hamburgers and hot dogs and served them for lunch.

All three stables at the event – Jordan's Gait, Ohio County Equestrian and Muhlenberg County Equestrian – are operated by volunteers, have no paid staff and offer their services at no charge. The volunteers include occupational and physical therapists and registered nurses who donate their time. Numerous individuals and area businesses donate money and supplies.

The parents of the participants said horseback riding helps their children emotionally as much as physically.

Logan Rovinski of Elizabethtown, who will be 7 on Halloween, has a rare chromosome disorder and Type II autoimmune hepatitis, among other things, said his mother, Donna Rovinski. When he was an infant, "the doctors gave him a pretty sad prognosis," she said. "They said he wouldn't be a functioning adult. He has far exceeded any goals we could have set."

When Logan started horseback riding, Donna Rovinski said, he was

*See RIDING, page 8*



# NAILE has dogs, ponies and more

*Special to KAN*

Some 200,000 people will be treated to nine major livestock divisions, a championship rodeo and a dog disc competition at the North American International Livestock Exposition Nov. 8-21 at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center in Louisville.

The North American is known as the largest all-breed purebred livestock exhibition in the world with more than 20,000 entries. More than 140 shows, sales, breed meetings, entertainment events and judging contests are scheduled.

**WHAT: North American International Livestock Exposition**

**WHEN: Nov. 8-21**

**WHERE: Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, Louisville**

Livestock exhibitors will compete in dairy cattle, dairy goats, llamas and alpacas, quarter horses, draft horses, beef cattle, Boer goats, market swine and sheep. Seven major youth judging contests are held during the show.

The Great Lakes Circuit Rodeo Finals Nov. 13-15 will offer \$70,000 in prizes to contestants from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin. The purse is among the richest of all Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association events and ranks second among circuit finals.

The U.S. Disc Dog National Championship Weekend will be Nov. 15-16. Five divisions will be offered for teams of all experience levels, including the nationals semi-final on Nov. 15 and the nationals final on Nov. 16. No pre-registration is required.

The Giant Country Store will offer nearly 150 commercial vendors with western wear, livestock equipment, and many other items.

Admission is \$5 for adults and \$2 for children, or \$20 for a pass for the entire exposition. Parking is \$4.

The North American has an annual economic impact of \$15.3 million to the Louisville area every year.

More information and entry forms are available on the Web at [www.livestockexpo.org](http://www.livestockexpo.org).

## Commissioner honors Governor's Scholars



Byron Brewer

Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Billy Ray Smith presented awards June 17 during the Agribusiness/Governor's Scholars Program Awards Luncheon in Frankfort. Receiving awards were, from left: front row – advisor Aris Cedeno, Erin Bogle, Laura Caudill, Barbra Jozwiak, Jordan Judy, Jeanne Prather, Elizabeth Hardesty, Jessica Cremeans, Laura Winstead and Commissioner Smith; back row – Ben Oak, David Vaught, Drew Richey, David Lewis, Anthony Jones, Emily Hayden, Jacob Heil, Katie Ellis and Megan Flynn. Not pictured: Josh Bruce, Samantha Childers, Pam Coffey, Alexandria Dailey, Cathy Gaudette, Dustin Gumm, Thomas Kelsay, Ellen Krajewski, Sarah Meeks, Carrie Shaffer, Jonetta Tabor, Josh Taylor and Grant Wonderlich.

## UK school offers latest grazing information

UK College of Agriculture

The University of Kentucky College of Agriculture will offer a two-day grazing school Oct. 14-15 at the Bourbon County Extension Office in Paris.

Participants will observe rotational grazing techniques at a local farm, said Donna Amaral-Phillips, UK Extension dairy nutritionist and co-coordinator of the school.

In the classroom, participants will hear the latest information about the benefits of improved grazing, traditional forages, how grasses and legumes respond to grazing and how to meet nutritional needs on pasture.

Students will participate in a case study of a hypothetical farm's fencing, grazing and water, and discuss their decisions at the end of the conference.

Other topics include temporary fencing, value of shade and water, portable and seasonal watering, establishing forages in pasture systems, managing grazing systems for maximum grazing season, managing surpluses in grazing systems with baleage, forages for problem times, as well as minerals for graz-

ing cattle, parasite control and rotational grazing, animal disorders on pasture and using grazing systems to meet water quality guidelines.

The Kentucky Grazing School is co-sponsored by the UK College of Agriculture, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Kentucky Forage and Grassland Council. The school is a Beef Integrated Resource Management Program and is partially funded by a grant from the USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems.

Early registration is encouraged because of limited space. A fee of \$100 includes all materials, grazing manual, breaks and selected meals. The fee must be paid to hold a place in the grazing school.

Make checks payable to Kentucky Forage and Grassland Council and send to Rebecca Smith, 400 W.P. Garrigus Building, Lexington, KY 40546-0215. For more information contact Donna Amaral-Phillips by phone at (859) 257-7542 or by e-mail at [damaral@uky.edu](mailto:damaral@uky.edu).

## Ewe's early life topic of workshop

UK College of Agriculture

A fall lambing school offered by the University of Kentucky will focus on teaching new and veteran sheep producers essential skills to help get their ewes through critical stages of late gestation, lambing, and early lactation.

The 15th annual event is scheduled for Oct. 8 at the UK Animal Research Center on U.S. 62 near Versailles. Applied management and hands-on opportunities related to the care of the

ewe in late gestation through creep feeding of lambs will be covered.

Registration is free and should be sent by Oct. 1 to: 2003 Lambing School, 911 W.P. Garrigus Bldg., University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40546-0215. For more information, contact Monty Chappell by phone at (859) 257-2716 or by e-mail at [mchappel@uky.edu](mailto:mchappel@uky.edu).

Attendees will be expected to follow biosecurity procedures and cannot have been outside the U.S. during the seven days prior to the field day.





Jimmy VanCleve

KDA's new grain safety trailer features miniature versions of a grain bin, augers and other equipment. The mobile demonstration unit will allow the KDA's Farm and Home Safety Program to teach grain farm safety and rescue throughout the state.

# Rollover tractor, bin promote farm safety

By **BYRON BREWER**

*Kentucky Agricultural News*

**T**wo new mobile exhibits will enable the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Farm and Home Safety program to demonstrate tractor and grain bin safety throughout the Commonwealth.

The tractor rollover simulator graphically displays the consequences of riding a tractor without proper safety equipment. KDA Farm and Home Safety Coordinator Dale Dobson first got the idea in May 2002 when he attended a Kentucky State Police demonstration of seat belt safety. A KSP exhibit had a pickup truck mounted to a trailer; when a button was pressed, hydraulics forced the vehicle to spin. Unbelted mannequins in the pickup rolled everywhere.

"I think we have gone them one better with our rollover simulator, and I've been told there is nothing like this in the nation," Dobson said. "We have a 40-horsepower Challenger 275 tractor bolted to a trailer 16 to 20 feet long and 8 feet wide. Push a button and the tractor turns over. If the rollbar and safety belts are correct, the farmer is OK. If not, he is thrown from the tractor and gets crushed to death."

With the exception of the mannequins, everything is real on the demonstrator, Dobson said. He wants that to "bring the message home" that rollbars are necessary.

With no rebuilding time necessary, the simulator – the product of over a year's work for Dobson, KDA and a group of volunteer partners – can be used time after time.

"We can take this to farms, schools, field days and show why farmers need to practice safety – for their sake and their family's sake," Dobson said. "Just like we do with the tractor driver, we can also set kid mannequins on the tractor the exact way we all have seen them ride with Dad or Granddad. Watching them fall when the tractor rolls over is not pretty."

The second mobile exhibit is a dream come true for Dobson: a grain safety trailer. Miniature versions of a grain bin, grain wagon, augers and other equipment found on a grain farm are mounted on a 28-foot gooseneck trailer. The mobile demonstration unit will allow Dobson to teach grain farm safety and rescue at virtually any location around the Commonwealth.

"I have wanted something like this for years," Dobson said. "There are so many dangers around grain bins – the danger of the auger, kids walking in the bin, many others – and this trailer seems to address them all. I'm really looking forward to doing demonstrations with this one."

For more information on KDA's Farm and Home Safety Program, contact the Division of Public Relations and Communications at (502) 564-4696.

## Kentucky well-represented at National FFA Convention

By **BYRON BREWER**

*Kentucky Agricultural News*

**S**everal Kentuckians will vie for top honors at the 2003 National FFA Convention Oct. 29-Nov. 1 at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center in Louisville.

The host state boasts one of the finalists for Agri-Science Teacher of the Year, 14 chapters that will compete for FFA Chapter of the Year, and nine students who are Agricultural Proficiency Finalists, said Curt Lucas, Kentucky FFA advisor.

"Kentucky's FFA chapters will certainly be an important part of this 75th-year observance," Lucas said.

More than 50,000 FFA members and advisors from throughout the United States will gather in Louisville for the fifth consecutive year to compete, visit the career show, and compare

notes with their counterparts from other states. They will discuss topics affecting the national organization and elect new national officers.

Alan Taylor of Owsley County High School is one of the finalists for Agri-Science Teacher of the Year. The nine Agricultural Proficiency Contest finalists from Kentucky are: Amanda Barger, Meade County, Ag Communications; Chad Benham, Meade County, Ag Mechanics; Andrew Bell, Larue County, Beef Production/Entrepreneurship; Pamela Coffey, Pulaski County, Fiber and Oil Crops; Trey Webb, Meade County, Food Sciences; Richard Medley, Washington County, Forage Production; Laura Comer, Ohio County, Sheep Production; Charlee Doom, Larue County, Small Animal Production; and Michael Cambron, Washington County, Specialty Crops. The

contingent of finalists is the largest number Kentucky has ever sent to the national convention.

Kentucky FFA chapters competing for FFA National Chapter of the Year honors are: Apollo, Meade County, Nelson County, Central Hardin, Spencer County, Oldham County, Larue County, East Carter, Caldwell County, Breckinridge County, Scott County, Taylor County, Wolfe County and West Jessamine. Six of the chapters have three-star ratings, the highest possible.

Scheduled speakers include:

- Dr. Lowell Catlett, an agriculture futurist and a professor at New Mexico State University who served as national FFA vice president in 1968-69. Catlett will speak during the two Opening Sessions Oct. 30 at 8 and 11:30 a.m. EST.

- Robin Roberts, news anchor for "Good Morning America" and a former

sportscaster and basketball standout. Roberts will speak Oct. 31 at 7 p.m.

- Staff Sgt. Christopher Stone, who was ambushed and held captive in Macedonia for 32 days in 1999. Stone will speak Nov. 1 at 12:30 p.m.

- Chad Varga, founder and president of the non-profit organization IN-SPIRE, which reaches out to young people through character-building seminars and presentations. Varga will speak Oct. 31 at 8 a.m.

Members and advisors will attend a wide selection of personal growth workshops. The 38th annual FFA Career Show, one of the largest youth-oriented career shows in the country, will feature some 330 exhibitors.

For more information on the 2003 FFA National Convention, log onto the organization's Web site at [www.ffa.org/convention/](http://www.ffa.org/convention/).



# Thanks, Kentucky, for eight memorable years

This is my last opportunity to speak to you in Kentucky Agricultural News. I am saddened to see my time as your agriculture commissioner come to a close, but I am pleased that the Kentucky Department of Agriculture has played a leading role in laying a firm foundation for the future of Kentucky agriculture during my tenure.

From the time I took office in 1996, I set out to help our farmers diversify, find markets and add value to their products. Kentucky has made great strides toward those goals. Beef producers are improving their herd genetics and their forages to increase their profits and compete in the upscale market. Other Kentucky farmers are producing non-traditional products with financial assistance from tobacco settlement funds and technical assistance from KDA, Extension, and other agricultural institutions.

Today, Kentucky vegetables and Kentucky catfish are being sold all over this part of the country. Kentucky country hams are reaching an ever-expanding market. And who would have thought that Ski would become a favorite in Cuba?



**Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner**

## Billy Ray Smith

Much has been done, but the future leaders of Kentucky agriculture still have much to do. As tobacco's future remains uncertain, we must sustain the momentum we have established. We must build on gains in horticulture, aquaculture, goat production, agriculture education, youth participation in livestock shows, farmers' markets and other opportunities. We must help our farmers obtain the capital they need to operate and develop the business skills they need to make good use of that capital.

We also must continue to educate consumers about the importance of agriculture and the great Kentucky Fresh products that are available right in their back yards.

As I prepare to leave office, I pledge that I will continue to help Kentucky farmers achieve a bright and prosperous future.

I have had the good fortune to serve alongside many bright, dedicated people on various agricultural boards, and I thank them for their service to the Commonwealth. I also am grateful for the hard-working men and women of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture who serve you every day.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife, Sandra, and my children for their unflagging support in eight years of long hours, late nights and extended periods of time away from home. I never could have done it without them.

Best wishes to everyone in Kentucky agriculture. God bless.

### Kentucky AGRICULTURAL News

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COMMISSIONER of AGRICULTURE

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# Degree livens up animal health officer's work

By SHANNON GOODPASTER

*Kentucky Agricultural News*

Shane Mitchell never knew his job could be so interesting until he added a little spice to it.

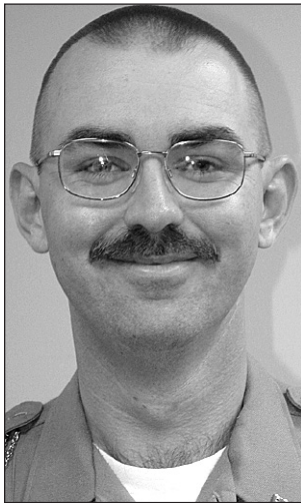
Mitchell, 26, of Flemingsburg, an employee of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health, graduated on Aug. 1 from Eastern Kentucky University with a degree in Criminal Justice.

Mitchell is no stranger to law enforcement. His grandfather, father, and brother have all served in law enforcement at some point or another.

"I used to give my brother a hard time about being in law enforcement and I always wondered why he would want that career. Now look at where I am," said Mitchell.

Mitchell earned a degree in Pre-Veterinary Medicine from Eastern Ken-

tucky University in 2000. He came to work for the KDA that year after having served internships in the summers of 1998 and 1999. As an inspector in the Division of Animal Health, Mitchell inspected stockyards, county fairs, equine events, trail rides and race-tracks to ensure they were meeting state regulations regarding animals. Mitchell



Shane Mitchell

also inspected, identified and quarantined animals that were brought into Kentucky. He worked with farmers and veterinarians on programs the division administers.

Mitchell enjoyed his work with the department, but he was given the opportunity to give his job a new twist. The Division of Animal Health had a Law Enforcement position open and Mitchell was asked if he would be interested. After he put some thought into it he headed off to the Criminal Justice Program on March 23.

The program lasted for 16 weeks and Mitchell was allowed to come home only on weekends. While in training, Mitchell had to learn how to communicate with people with different temperaments. He also had to learn new skills in firearms, driving, and officer safety. During this time he partici-

pated in physical training and learned defensive tactics.

Since graduation Mitchell has been out in the field enjoying his new job. He is still inspecting, but most of his work takes place out on the roads. Mitchell is authorized to pull over vehicles that are transporting animals for surveillance stops and to see that health papers are compliant with state regulations. He said the only difference between his previous job and his new job is that now he carries a gun and drives with blue lights.

When asked how his new degree has changed his career, Mitchell replied, "It adds a little more excitement to the day's activity."

Mitchell hopes stay in his current job for years to come. "I enjoy the Department of Agriculture," he said. "I hope to be right here."

## PACE preserves property for agricultural purposes

*KAN staff report*

Kentucky's Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program continues to work toward the goal of preserving agricultural lands for agriculture production.

The program acquired the first easements only five years ago and since has grown to include 75 farms containing 14,565 acres as of Sept. 8. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture, which administers the program, has received 577 applications from 70 counties statewide totaling over 102,500 acres since the beginning of the program. Enrolled farms have an easement recorded at the local courthouse that ensures the farm will remain in agriculture and will not be developed or used for any purpose other than farming at any time in the future. The owner retains all other rights associated with owning the land.

Interested parties begin the process by filling out an application, which is available on the KDA Web site, and submitting a soil map and a topo-

graphic map to the Department. These maps can be obtained at the local Natural Resources Conservation Service office. Farms are then scored on many different characteristics to determine how they compare with other applications. Next, the farms are ranked by their score. The highest-ranking scores are the first farms considered for acquisition. The selected farms' owners and the PACE Board then negotiate a purchase price using two independent appraisals commissioned by the state. Once a price is agreed upon, the farm is surveyed, a title search is done and payment is made. The process usually takes about 12 months.

Although the program was established to purchase easements, landowners are encouraged to donate easements. Donors may receive federal and state income tax and estate tax benefits. Fifteen easements totaling 2,672 acres have been donated.

Additional information is available on the KDA Web site, [www.kyagr.com](http://www.kyagr.com), or by calling the Division of Farmland Preservation at (502) 564-4696.

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# \$250,000!!



Ted Sloan



Ted Sloan

Brown-Forman Corp. of Louisville bought the grand champion country ham with a winning bid of \$250,000 at the Kentucky Farm Bureau Country Ham Breakfast Aug. 21, eclipsing the old record of \$118,000 set by the late Oliver Raymond in 1999. Left: Kate Wood, 6, daughter of Brown-Forman Chief Financial Officer Phoebe Wood, finds a creative way to make a \$180,000 bid for Brown-Forman. Above, from left: front row - Phoebe Wood; auctioneer Jack Crowner with the grand champion country ham; and Kate Wood; back row - Miss Kentucky MacKenzie Mayes; Agriculture Commissioner Billy Ray Smith; David Beck, executive vice president of Kentucky Farm Bureau; Jim Robertson of Finchville Farms, which produced the grand champion ham; KFB President Sam Moore; Gov. Paul E. Patton; Bill Robertson of Finchville Farms; and Marty Tichenor, corporate homeplace manager for Brown-Forman.





# Scenes from the fair

Right: The Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Tess Caudill waits for a playing partner at the old cracker barrel at the Kentucky Fresh/Kentucky Proud Market. Bottom left: Mollie Dixon, 10, of Greenville, gives her country ham presentation to Agriculture Commissioner Billy Ray Smith. Bottom right: Produce Man (Kim Mullins) makes a friend.



Shannon Goodpaster



Ted Sloan



Shannon Goodpaster



# Riding helps special kids

*Continued from Page 1*

unable to sit on the horse. At the September event, Logan rode unaided.

Amber Pepin, 8, of Elizabethtown, has a seizure disorder, her mother, Mary Ann Pepin, said. She has been attending Jordan's Gait for about a year.

"She loves being on horses. She just glows when she's on them," Mary Ann Pepin said. "You can tell she's so happy."

Riding has helped Amber improve her balance and also has boosted her self-esteem, her mother said.

Jennifer Rieger's 4-year-old son, Ean, has cerebral palsy and cortical vision impairment, a condition in which his central vision is not developed. Rieger, of Pewee Valley, said Ean has developed more muscle tone, allowing him to sit and spread his legs better. Ean also is talking and interacting with people more, Jennifer Rieger said.

"I don't know how riding a horse affects that, but every time he gets on a horse he talks," she said.

Scott Taylor, 14, who has Down's syndrome, began riding at Jordan's Gait after his mother, Karen, spoke with the mother of another rider, Faith Manion, who is blind. Faith rode into the arena with two American flags to open the day's activities.

"Scott shows no fear," Karen Taylor said. "He has more confidence. His posture has gotten better."

"His brother shows cattle, and he showed the grand champion at the state

fair. It's so neat when you go home and Scott has his own ribbons. It's nice to have something he can do and be confident and not just be a spectator."

"You have to work with every disability in a different way," Donna Means said. "You have to learn how to evaluate the child and what you need to do to work with them and help them progress as much as possible."

Jordan's Gait has about 30 students each week, Donna Means said. The stable takes horses and riders to nursing homes and hosts school field trips. It had served some 150 people this year by early September.

The stable was named for the daughter of a nephew of the Meanses. Jordan, who was blind, was pegged to be

the stable's first rider but died of complications from surgery at age 11.

All three stables at the Jordan's Gait Invitational trace their parentage to John and Rhonda Leach, who started Ohio County Equestrian 13 years ago. The Leaches had three children with neurological conditions and explored horseback riding as a way to help them. Ohio County Equestrian has 60 riders on its books today.

The Meanses and the Vincents trained at Ohio County before opening their own stables. Jordan's Gait opened in 2001, and Muhlenberg County Equestrian started last December.

"The Good Lord had a mission for us," Rhonda Leach said.

## Jordan's Gait Stables

(270) 862-2290

## Muhlenberg Co. Equestrian

(270) 338-3695

## Ohio County Equestrian

(270) 274-9650



Ted Sloan

Ken Lee Desmond, 3, bonds with her steed as John Leach looks to see what's coming up.

# Green River co-op growing

*Continued from Page 12*

awarded Green River \$224,000 in start-up money, and Kentucky Farm Bureau and the Commodity Growers Cooperative also have supplied grants.

Howell makes two trips to every grower's farm each year to check on their progress. He also helps growers with business management. Chris Clark, the Hart County agriculture Extension agent, also works with growers and was one of the founders of the co-op.

UK's Extension Service helps recruit new growers during the off-season. It grows demonstration plots and conducts field days.

Howell said longtime burley tobacco growers who are trying vegetable production are learning to

look at their job in a different way.

"They're used to taking (tobacco) to market and they get something for all of it, from the stalk to the top," he said.

"The educational challenge with a product like cantaloupe is that they've got to take the low-quality melons out."

As the co-op's growers have gained experience and education over the years, their cull rates have decreased, saving them and the co-op time and money, Gentry said.

Whereas the co-op once struggled to survive, it now is experiencing growing pains. It needs more cooler space and more loading docks as its production continues to grow.

"The hard part is getting farmers," said Sammy Monroe, the co-op president. "The potential is so great."



Ted Sloan

Nathan Howell, left; Allison Shepherd, director of the Kentucky Produce and Aquaculture Alliance; and Michael Gentry show the 20 states that get Green River produce.



# Old methods used to raise produce for Wal-Mart

By BYRON BREWER

*Kentucky Agricultural News*

The horse is a farm tool of yesteryear, and yet its worth is proven every day in Casey County as Mennonite farmers use tried-and-true farming practices to benefit customers of modern retail giant Wal-Mart.

The Mennonites settled decades ago about 10 miles south of Liberty. The horse is still a beast of burden here today, used for plowing, transportation and many other forgotten needs.

Like his relatives whose farms surround his own, Elvin Shirk is no stranger to the demands of farm work. His toil, and his skill with horses, enable him, his wife and their 11 children to raise cantaloupes, peppers and watermelon for a living.

"This is good land and you can see that in what is grown here," Shirk said. "We have been happy here and it is a good place to live."

Shirk has a small processing unit on his farm where family members help to grade and box up the "gifts of the land." For four years, Wal-Mart has been a partner in Shirk's Kentucky Fresh Athena melons as well as many commodities produced by the rest of the area's Mennonite families.

"To visit Elvin Shirk is eye-opening," said Mike Salisbury, regional produce buyer for Wal-Mart. "To realize that his 140 acres of farmland is

worked with horses and not machinery is hard for some to fathom, yet this grower turns out top-notch product year after year for us. In all the years Mr. Shirk has been an Athena (melon) supplier for Wal-Mart, he has yet to have a rejection of product for any reason, and that in itself is amazing to me."

Salisbury brought produce managers from several Wal-Mart stores to Casey County Aug. 5 on a farm tour arranged by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and coordinated by Jim Mansfield, director of the Division of Value-Added Horticulture and Aquaculture. As they toured Shirk's melon and pepper fields, his children worked gathering, sorting and packing.

Shirk is also the commodity schedule-keeper for South Fork Produce. A type of wholesale clearinghouse amid the farms, it is complete with a loading dock and a retail operation. The community cooperative is supported by 60 families that live in the area, many of them related to Shirk.

It is no small trip from Shirk's farm to the large, barn-like structure in South Fork. Paved roads – sometimes two lanes, many times one — wind through verdant fields of peppers and melons. Horse-drawn carriages loaded with goods and children are on the same narrow road, as are young women riding bicycles and wearing the garb of another century.

Ammon Zimmerman, manager of



Shannon Goodpaster

*Elvin Shirk, right, slices a Kentucky Fresh watermelon for a recent produce buyers' tour.*

South Fork Produce, is busy at the cash register as Mennonites, tourists and Casey Countians buy Kentucky Fresh products and other agricultural items.

"Business has been good and we do well," said the humble Zimmerman, who will spare only a moment from his cash drawer. "On a good day, I'd say we are able to process about 7,000 cantaloupes, just as an example. They are

washed, graded, boxed and then put in our cooler."

Zimmerman freely admits things have been a bit easier since Wal-Mart became a partner with South Fork.

"This is a good life here," said Phares Shirk, Elvin's father, looking from the loading dock of South Fork Produce to his own sprawling farm nearby. "Yes sir, a good life."

## Dairy producer award is tribute to late husband, father

By BYRON BREWER

*Kentucky Agricultural News*

When they were children, David and John Hord wanted to be farmers like their father. So when their small Lewis County operation won the second annual Quality Dairy Producer Award Aug. 15 during the Kentucky State Fair, they knew the late Eugene Hord was smiling down on them.

The annual competition is open to all dairies in the state. The honor is based on industry quality standards and farm inspections. Last year's winner, Springhill Farm owned by the Marcum family of Carter County, is also located in northeastern Kentucky. Dairy Products of Kentucky, the Kentucky Milk Producers Association and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture sponsor the award.

"No one told us we had won, so it was a complete surprise," said Loraine Hord, mother of David and John, who run the 240-acre dairy farm. "They told

us we might have placed in the top three. Well, I heard them name third place and then second. I said to my son, 'We aren't going to win.' You could have knocked me over with a feather when I heard them say 'Hord Dairy' when they announced the winner."

The family received a farmgate sign and a cash award. Jerry Trester, Dairy Farmers of America field representative, nominated the Hord family.

"My brother (John) and I do all the labor at the dairy," David Hord said. "We keep everything clean and we have some real quality Holsteins, I feel. We started this dairy as a three-way partnership: my dad, Johnny and me. Dad would definitely be tickled we won an award for quality."

The Hord dairy farm has about 200 head of cattle. The brothers milk 56 cows twice daily, averaging about 50 pounds of milk per cow per day. The Hords have a freestyle barn with a double-four parlor, which houses eight milking units.

"David and I have to coordinate our family and business schedules closely," John Hord said. "Someone has always got to be available around milking time." John missed the dairy banquet Aug. 15 so he could milk. "That is our main secret," he said. "The cows come first with all of us."

David and wife Kim have two children, Amanda and Bryan. John and wife Rhonda also have two children, Jessica and Robbie. The brothers co-own a 64-acre farm near the dairy where they grow hay and corn.

"Our judges are very familiar with Kentucky's dairy industry and consider several factors," said Eunice Schlappi, the KDA's dairy marketing specialist and one of the judges for the Quality Dairy Producer Award. "We look at things like somatic cell count, standard plate count, barn inspections and bacteria count."

Eugene and Loraine Hord bought the farm, located near Tollesboro, in 1972, she said. Both from farming back-

grounds, the Hords initially raised tobacco and beef cattle. "The bottom dropped out of beef" years later, Loraine Hord said, so the family began the dairy.

"They always followed their daddy around the farm when they were little," Loraine said. "I guess that's all they wanted to be – farmers. The boys told us they would stay with the operation five years. Almost at the end of that time, in 1991, Eugene passed away. The boys have kept the dairy and I've remained on the farm."

Loraine also has two daughters – Beverly Cooper and Brenda Kirkland, both of whom live in Fleming County.

"We pride ourselves on a clean milking facility and a quality product," John said. "This award makes David and me proud, and I know Dad would have loved it too."

For more information on the Quality Dairy Producer Award, call Schlappi at (502) 564-3956 or David Klee, DPAK executive director, at (502) 867-7843.



# Short Rows: *A brief look at what's new in Kentucky agriculture*

## West Nile cases decline

*KAN staff report*

The number of West Nile Virus cases in Kentucky equine this year is well below the number at the same point in 2002, Kentucky Department of Agriculture officials said.

They cautioned that Kentucky likely will not be out of the woods before the first hard frost kills the mosquitoes that carry the virus.

"We urge equine owners to continue to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds and take other steps to minimize the risk of West Nile infection," Agriculture Commissioner Billy Ray Smith said.

The KDA's Division of Animal Health reported that 51 equine cases of West Nile had been confirmed as of Sept. 19, compared with 327 cases on the same day last year.

Dr. Don Notter, the state veterinarian, said equine owners who have not vaccinated their animals should consult with their veterinarians about vaccinating this year. "Even if the vaccination is given too late for this year, they can establish a program that will help protect their equine next year after they receive a booster," he said.

The state Cabinet for Health Services reported six human cases of West Nile in Kentucky and no deaths as of Sept. 17.

For information on West Nile and tips on preventing infection, go to the state West Nile Web site at [www.westnile.ky.gov](http://www.westnile.ky.gov).

## Watershed restoration grants offered

*Kentucky Division of Water*

Grants totaling \$3.5 million are available for watershed restoration projects and watershed implementation plan development as well as other nonpoint source pollution control projects to help mitigate or prevent runoff pollution.

The Kentucky Division of Water is offering an initial interest form on the Web at <http://www.water.ky.gov/dow/npswebform.htm> that potential applicants must fill out. The Web form must be submitted by Feb. 4, 2004. The new process is intended to enable the Division of Water to better assist those wishing to apply for funds.

The Division of Water has also prepared a grant guidance document to walk potential applicants through the process of applying for grant funds. The grant guidance document is available at <http://www.water.ky.gov/dow/npsguide.htm>.

Funds for the grants are provided to Kentucky by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. They can be used to pay for up to 60 percent of the total cost for each project. A 40 percent nonfederal match is required.

## Deadline for SARE grant applications is Dec. 5

*Special to KAN*

Farmers, ranchers and producer groups have until Dec. 5 to apply for a Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) producer grant.

Grants will be awarded in March 2004 for up to \$10,000 for individual producers or \$15,000 for producer groups. Farmers must make up the majority of the governing board for a producer group to be eligible.

Eligible applicants must conduct marketing or research projects related to sustainable agriculture. The grant guidelines list the required focus areas and examples of funded projects. All projects must have "cooperators" who can be individuals, researchers, governmental, or non-governmental organizations. Awardees must sign contracts with the Southern SARE.

All funded projects must have outreach programs to inform others of project results. Grant funds cannot be used for starting or expanding or making permanent improvements to farms.

More information is available on the Web at [www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare/callpage.html](http://www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare/callpage.html).

## New crops explored at conference

*Special to KAN*

The New Crop Opportunities Center at the University of Kentucky will host a New Crop Opportunities Conference on Nov. 15 at Sheraton Suites in Lexington.

Speakers at the conference will be farmers who are growing blackberries, blueberries, edamame, hydroponic tomatoes, wheat, sorghum, greenhouse bedding plants, and nursery crops. UK faculty, staff, and students who are doing New Crops research will be available to answer questions.

Registration fee is \$15 if you register by Oct. 1 and \$25 after Oct. 1. Lunch will be available at no additional charge. For more information and a registration packet, contact Christy Cassady by phone at (859) 257-1477 or by e-mail at [cgcass0@uky.edu](mailto:cgcass0@uky.edu)

## Womack wins at national show

*Special to KAN*

A Kentucky exhibitor took top honors at the 2003 National Junior Angus Show July 13-19 in Louisville.

Katrina Womack of Pembroke showed the grand champion bred and owned female, Grandview Womack Miss 7172. The event attracted 663 exhibitors from 35 states who showed 1,165 head.

Kristopher Lynn of Springfield claimed second place and \$250 in the 37th National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest July 18-19 during the junior Angus show. The contest drew 57 competitors from 31 states.

Womack showed the grand champion and reserve grand champion bred and owned bulls and the reserve grand champion bull at the Kentucky Junior Angus Preview Show in June in Bowling Green. Charles Boyd of Mayslick showed the grand champion bred and owned female, and Lynn showed the reserve grand champion. Rachel Kloentrup of Morning View exhibited the reserve grand champion owned female.

Robert Campbell of Springfield exhibited the grand champion bull at the preview show. Lynn led the grand champion female, and Josh Adams of Nicholasville showed the reserve grand champion female. Nicole Pellicano of Perryville exhibited the grand champion cow-and-calf pair, and Ben Brown of Woodburn had the reserve grand champion.

## Leitchfield teen is NJSA region director

*Special to KAN*

Hope Ballman, 17, of Leitchfield, has been elected an Eastern Region director of the National Junior Swine Association.

Holly is a senior at Breckinridge County High School. She is the daughter of Kelly and Wendy Ballman and Janet Ballman, all of Leitchfield. She was elected during the National Junior Summer Spectacular in Louisville in July.

Also during the Spectacular, Ballman was named the champion extemporaneous speaker. Julie P'Pool of Cadiz won second place in the Senior Speech Contest.

## Kentucky continues to get record rain

*UK College of Agriculture*

The period from April through August was among the wettest on record in Kentucky, said Tom Priddy, agriculture meteorologist for the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture.

"August rainfall ranked 11th wettest in 109 years," Priddy said. "But when combined with the previous four months, April through August rainfall was 28.55 inches, making it the second-wettest April through August period in 109 years."

The wettest April through August was in 1979 with 29.16 inches.

Projections were for near-normal rainfall going into September but remnants of tropical storm Grace and hurricane Isabela dumped more rain on an already soaked Commonwealth.

After a cooler-than-average summer, August temperatures reversed the cool pattern with a lengthy period of above-normal temperatures.



# CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

NOTICE: Agriculture-related classified ads are run free of charge in KENTUCKY AGRICULTURAL NEWS. FOR SALE items must be restricted to residents of Kentucky. Address advertisements to KENTUCKY AGRICULTURAL NEWS, 7th Floor, 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, KY 40601. PRINT your name, address and city or county plainly. All communications and transactions must be made between interested parties, and the Department of Agriculture assumes no liability for such transactions. The Department of Agriculture also reserves the right to refuse advertisements as well as dismiss advertisements due to date, space restrictions, etc. Persons using this service are encouraged also to utilize private press media for their advertisements.

## ANIMALS

**COMMERCIAL HEIFER SALE**, Saturday, Oct. 4, 11 a.m. CDT. Green Valley Cattle Co., 2085 Barren River Road, Bowling Green, Ky. Call Kelly Smith for catalog (270) 782-8285 nights, (270) 842-6171 days.

**CHAROLAIS PERFORMANCE YEARLING BULLS.** Sired by TT Real Stryker 1953H. Very good EPDs with above average weaning and yearling weights. Good pedigrees. \$1,200 each. Free delivery within 50 miles. River Ridge Farms. Call (270) 528-3323, ask for Greg, or e-mail glsweet@scrtc.com. Canmer, Ky.

**FOR SALE:** Registered service age Holstein bulls. A.I.-sired from high producing, high testing cows. Jm-Mar-D Holsteins, 3638 Trimble Rd., Adairville, KY 42202. Call Jim at (270) 539-9072.

**TRAMMEL CHAROLAIS:** Bulls, females, tops in Kentucky. Bulls test for 10 years. Bulls available with low birth weights and high weaning weights. Reasonable prices. Fred D. Trammel, 527 Trammel Rd., Bagdad, KY 40003, (502) 747-8864.

**BOER GOATS FOR SALE:** Registered bucks and nannies, fullbloods and percentages with papers, quality breeding and show stock, contact Larry Cole, Cole's Creek Boer Goats, Bowling Green, Ky., (270) 777-0054 or (270) 535-0054.

**ANIMALS:** Boer goat does for sale. Top quality. Starting at \$600. Also, bucks for sale. Lillian H. Kinsey, (502) 857-4778, lilys@iglou.com.

**FOR SALE:** Maine-Anjou Bull, Black, NAILE Division Champion, sired by Fear This. (812) 536-4574

**FOR SALE:** Registered Border Collies – adorable – well marked – black & white – shots & wormed – (270) 465-7961.

**50 BLACK OR BW FACED OPEN HEIFERS** – wgt. approx. 800 lbs. All shots & vet checked. 1/4 Hol – 3/4 Angus. Helm Farms, Perryville, Ky., (859) 332-7912.

**FOR SALE:** Registered Boer goats; bucks and nannies, fullbloods and percentage with papers. Garden Gate Boer Goats, (270) 325-2972.

**MINIATURE HORSES**, for fun and profit. AMHA registered. DNA'd horses of quality. Reasonable prices. Jean Daniels, Forest Farm Miniature Horses, 8080 Subtle Road, Edmonton, Kentucky 42129, phone (270) 432-5836, e-mail a61853@scrtc.com, Web page www.minihorse.ws

**FOR SALE:** Registered Angus bulls, A.I. sired, EPDs that meet program guidelines, fully vaccinated, fully guaranteed, delivery available. Call (270) 384-0327. Elk Creek Angus, J.M. Shelley, Columbia, Ky.

**FOR SALE:** Registered Boer goats; bucks and nannies, full bloods and percentage with papers. Call (270) 749-4232.

**FOR SALE:** New Powder River Chute. Nine cows and one bull. Excellent starter herd. For details, call (270) 358-3758.

**FOR SALE:** Polled Hereford and Gelbvieh bulls. Meet Bull Program standards. Clifford Farms, (859) 234-6956.

**FOR SALE:** Registered Limousin bulls. Black Polled and Red Polled available. Call Donnie or Joey Massey, (606) 864-6961.

**FOR SALE:** Purebred Charolais Bulls. Hamilton Charolais, Stamping Ground, Ky. Call Jim Hamilton at (502) 535-6203 or e-mail hamil535@bellsouth.net.

**FOR SALE:** Registered Angus bulls and heifers. Bulls eligible for 50% cost-share. Call nights (502) 863-6342, days (859) 221-5958.

**FOR SALE:** AKC Labs. Absolutely beautiful. Black or yellow. Shots, wormed. \$125-\$250. Love people, hunting and swimming. Phone (270) 879-8708. Delivery possible.

**FOR SALE:** Registered English Shepherd pups. All-purpose dogs, farm-raised. Shots, wormed. Contact Janice Sallee, (270) 465-7848.

**FOR SALE:** South American llamas. Males and bred females. Registered; some microchipped. Assorted colors and wool types. Friendly, and in excellent health. Call (606) 379-6040, or e-mail at Dscbuis@aol.com.

**FOR SALE:** Lovable and friendly llamas, males and females of all ages, breeding pairs, stud quality / pet quality males. Guard llamas for small herd animals, sheep and goats. Over 10 years experience and expertise will serve you after your purchase. Call (859) 341-4188 or e-mail drycreek@fuse.net.

**FOR SALE:** Purebred Angus bulls and reg. Angus heifers. Pottinger Angus Farm. Call Randy at (270) 324-3062 or Herman at (270) 324-3423 or e-mail pfangus@juno.com.

**FOR SALE:** Polled Hereford bulls & heifers. (502) 348-4167. Moran Farms - Bardstown - Bloomfield.

**BRANGUS CATTLE FOR SALE:** Registered, purebreds and commercial black Brangus bulls and heifers. EPDs available with several qualifying for grant monies. If you are interested in decreasing calving problems and pinkeye and increasing weaning weights then you would be interested in Brangus cattle. Circle C Brangus, Big Clifty, KY, (270) 242-7006, susanc@aggressiveonline.net.

**FOR SALE/STUD SERVICE:** Horses / ponies (all types), new / used trailers, metal roofing & siding, Mule Kote Paint, new / used tack (over 30 saddles), feed store (10% horse feed \$4.25 / 50lb), Wrangler, Panhandle Slim and Lucille clothing, watches, childrens and adult cowboy hats, chaps, ladies western purses, boots, etc. Gray AQHA stud service Poco & Easy Jet \$200 / \$100. L&R FARMS, 1239 Morgantown Rd. (Hwy. 70), Brownsville, KY 42210. Phone (270) 286-9465, (270) 792-6636.

**FOR SALE:** Club calves. Maine and Chi crosses. Reasonably priced. Excellent quality. Call for detailed information. Staley Farms, Sharpsburg. (606) 247-2008.

**FOR SALE:** Simmental bulls, red and black, polled and AI sired. Burton's Simmental, Columbia, Ky. Phone (270) 384-5255.

**FOR SALE:** Registered Angus cattle, bulls and heifers. Balanced EPDs. Fall Creek Angus, Monticello, Ky. Call nights (606) 348-6588.

**FOR SALE:** Registered and commercial Angus bulls. Good lines, large selection, 3-7 years old. Contact Jason Smith, (270) 846-4972 and leave a message.

**FOR SALE:** Modern Simmental bulls — polled. AI sired, solid patterned reds or blacks, great EPDs. Chowning's Wind Rose Farm, Berea. Call (606) 986-3284.

**FOR SALE:** The University of Kentucky offers thoroughbred and quarter horses of various ages for sale during the year. For information about available horses, call (859) 257-7509.

**FOR SALE:** Kentucky mountain saddle horses. Reg. chocolate. Babies \$2,000. Bred mares. Mares with babies. Call (859) 987-7151 nights.

**FOR SALE:** Registered full-blood Pinzgauer heifers and bulls ready for service. Contact: Dickson's Pinzgauer Farm, Bowling Green, KY, (270) 529-2962.

## EQUIPMENT

**PLANS TO BUILD YOUR OWN BAND SAW-MILLS.** "The Lum-BR-Jak" can saw up to a 30" diameter log. "The Yellow•Jak•It" can saw up to a 36" diameter log. Introductory information \$3 U.S.A. or \$4 Canada, U.S. funds only. Builders plans / packets are \$48.50 each U.S. or \$51 each Canada (in U.S. funds only). A builders 48 min. video w / 40-page supplement book, same price as plans. Call or write Bill Reeks, 7104B U.S. Hwy 231 S., Cromwell, KY 42333-9605, (270) 274-3361.

**PORTABLE BANDSAW MILL:** 24 horse Honda, 36 in. diameter x 16 ft. length log capacity, 17" throat depth, trailer package – \$6,500. Will also build to your specifications. Call Jonathan 8 a.m.-5 p.m. CT weekdays @ (270) 401-1529.

## PROPERTY FOR SALE

**HOME FOR SALE.** Located 1.3 miles from boat ramp at Rough River. 2 BR, 2 baths, 2 large porches, covered. 2 car ports. Large garage and workshop. 4 acres. 2 ponds, one spring-fed and stocked. Smoke house. Screened-in pool attached to house. Call (270) 257-8102 or Priscilla, (270) 769-1211.

**164 ACRE FARM IN LOGAN COUNTY:** Fenced and creek for cattle, deer, turkey and small game for hunting. 20 minutes from Bowling Green, very private on Old Greenville Rd with county water available. Priced to sell at \$179,000. Call (270) 542-6844.

**120 ACRE FARM FOR SALE**, Williamsburg, Ky. (Whitley County) 3-bedroom house, 1 bath, full basement. Three ponds, 2 stocked with fish. Three barns and other buildings. Creek runs through property. Call (606) 549-2524.

**BEAUTIFUL BUILDING LOTS.** 10 left. All have growing timber or market-ready Christmas trees. One stocked pond; good hunting; approved for septic systems; good aquifer approximately 400 feet deep. Meade County, northwest of Brandenburg. Reasonably priced from \$11,054. Timber Trace, (502) 339-6455.

**88-ACRE FARM**, with barns, deep well, ponds, and timber. Adjacent house on 18-acre hilltop, four years old, 4,600 sq. ft. Timber Trace, (502) 339-6455.

## HOUSEHOLD

**I DO MACHINE QUILTING**, pretty designs. I furnish batting & thread, reasonable prices. Mail top & lining to me & I will mail back to you plus postage. (270) 842-0430.

**KENTUCKY SAMPLER COOKBOOK** is a cumulative work of the members and friends of The Embroiderers' Guild of America, Louisville Chapter and contains the embroidery chart for the Kentucky Sampler pictured on the cover. Great gift. Send \$10 plus \$2 postage to Judi Smith, 4605 Southern Pkwy, Louisville, KY 40214.

**COOKBOOKS:** Two anniversary editions. Over 600 pages in our 60th Anniversary Recipe Book for only \$12.72 (including tax), plus \$3 shipping, and our 65th Anniversary Recipe Book with five years of new recipes for just \$10.60, plus \$3 shipping. Buy both for \$21.20 plus \$6 shipping. Proceeds fund our college scholarship program. Order from Warren RECC Recipe Books, P.O. Box 1118, Bowling Green, KY 42102-1118 or call (270) 842-6541.

**FOR SALE:** Cookbook. \$10 inclues S&H. A collection of Family Favorite Recipes compiled by the members of Mt. Lebanon Missionary Baptist Church at Alvaton, Ky. Contact Michelle Corder, 1533 Cooper Dearing Road, Alvaton, Ky. 42122.

## MISCELLANEOUS

**WANTED – FISHERMEN** – Use Cumberland River Farm Campground as your fishing camp. Full hookups, hot showeers. Boat dock approx. 1 mile. Shady beach area. Located on the lower Cumberland River in Livingston County. Near LBL and Paducah. (270) 928-2180 or e-mail hmaupin@smithland.net.

**FOR SALE:** 22"x28" print of Lewisburg, Ky., Logan Co. – shows old Lewisburg High School, Lewisburg Methodist Church, Mt. Pleasant Bapt. Church, Lewisburg Bank, Gower drugstore, Old Ranger Cafe, Diamond Springs Hotel. \$30. Contact Patricia Cauley Foster, 923 McPherson, Madisonville, KY 42431, (270) 821-0085.

**WANTED:** Kentucky State Fair programs, ribbons, other items with the name of KSF affixed. Also, programs, books, etc. related to Saddle Horses and Hackneys. Send item, condition, price. E-mail tkccsa@aol.com or write Box 389, Lexington, KY 40508.

## SEEDS/PLANTS

**BLUEBERRY PLANTS**, Kentucky grown blueberry bushes. Kentucky Nursery License No. 85 A. Member of Kentucky Blueberry Growers Association, Inc. Contact us for information on this low maintenance crop with income of \$9,000 to \$18,000 per acre average possible. Larry Martin & Jean Daniels, Bluegrass Blueberries, 8080 Subtle Road, Edmonton, Kentucky 42129, phone (270) 432-5836, e-mail a61853@scrtc.com, Web page URL <http://www.blueberries.biz>





# Green River farmers make rivers of green

## Co-op overcomes early stumbles

By TED SLOAN

*Kentucky Agricultural News*

Three years ago, the Green River Produce Marketing Cooperative appeared to be headed the way of previous efforts to grow and sell vegetables in Kentucky: under the category of what might have been.

A fortuitous partnership and a new packaging line helped the fledgling co-op get on its feet. This year, Green River produced and packaged 100 acres of cantaloupes, 65 acres of cabbage, 22 acres of seedless watermelons and 50 acres of pumpkins. Southern Kentucky produce packed at Green River is being shipped to 20 states.

"It's all coming together," said Nathan Howell, an Extension agent attached to the co-op.

The most recent significant improvement to the packing plant came earlier this year when the University of Kentucky's Department of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering connected the electronic counters on the packaging line to a computer in a small office that counts numbers of cantaloupes for each producer. Now employees who box the vegetables don't have to keep count of the number of cantaloupes in each bin, and the sorting line doesn't have to be stopped from one producer to the next.

"I can account for every melon a farm brings in," said Michael Gentry, the co-op's general manager.

The system assures growers that

they're being credited with the product they deliver and speeds up the packing process. It also enables the co-op to pinpoint growers who deliver low-quality produce so they can go back to the farm and correct the problem.

### Packing line, partnership turning points

Last year, the co-op began operating a new packing line just in time for the cabbage harvest. The new line has dramatically increased the co-op's speed and efficiency. It has the capacity to process 600 acres of melons a year; this year's output was 100 acres. By the end of July, the co-op had loaded 52 tractor-trailer loads of cantaloupes this year. "I can remember the time when we struggled to load 12," Gentry said.

Green River began to take off when it joined forces with Farm-vey Produce Inc., a Florida distributorship, three years ago. Farm-vey markets the co-op's products, and a company representative watches for quality in the packing plant and helps growers with problems in the field.

"They've been a godsend to us," Gentry said. With Farm-vey's marketing network, "We've got a market we can never fill," he said. The co-op also works with local buyers.

Green River has 43 grower-members in about a dozen counties in southern and southwestern Kentucky, including one in Murray, about 3 1/2 hours from the packaging plant.

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*We've got a market we can never fill."*

*—Michael Gentry, general manager*



Workers catch cantaloupes from the packaging line to gently lower them into bins.



*Sammye Jo Monroe, an employee at the Green River co-op, demonstrates the system that counts the number of cantaloupes from each farmer.*

Photos by Ted Sloan

One early August day near the end of the cantaloupe harvest, first-year grower Tim Davis brought in 2,043 melons. The Davis family farm has abandoned tobacco and diversified into vegetables, freshwater shrimp and 24,000 chickens that produce up to 20,000 eggs a day. Davis said that, even with the impact of this past summer's wet, cool weather, he figures he'll make a little money on his cantaloupes. He said he'll try again next year, and he'll attend some of the classes UK's Cooperative Extension Service conducts at the co-op for growers during the off-season.

"They're exactly what this co-op is set up for," Gentry said.

### Cantaloupe crunch

This has been a challenging growing season for the Green River co-op and its producer-members. The early summer was unseasonably cool and rainy, which caused the cantaloupes to take longer to ripen. When a break in the weather came, the cantaloupes ripened all at once. During the last week of July, pickups with wagons were lined up to deliver their harvest, and tractor-trailers were lined up to receive it. But, with the benefit of experience and the new equipment, the co-op made it through the crunch with little trouble.

The co-op's season starts with cabbage. After the cantaloupes are finished, Green River packed seedless watermelons for the Kentucky Department of

Agriculture's Farm-to-School Program and is finishing with pumpkins.

### Early struggles

The co-op struggled in the early years after its creation in 1998. Its first packing line was inadequate, its coolers broke down, and its growers were still learning how to meet the buyers' demands for the new products.

In its second year, a deal to buy Green River cantaloupes fell through. Gentry called a friend who owns a trucking brokerage in Florida, who suggested that Gentry contact Farm-vey.

Gentry sent Farm-vey a truckload of cantaloupes. Farm-vey rejected it. Farm-vey came back the next year anyway and sold Green River's produce without a contract. The relationship has blossomed ever since.

Today the co-op employs 32 people at its packing facility, an old tobacco warehouse that it acquired from the Horse Cave and Hart County governments. Gentry is the only full-time employee.

Along with Farm-vey, a number of players have joined forces to make Green River a success. The co-op has obtained \$1.5 million in grants, including more than \$1 million from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board, most of which went toward the purchase of the new packing line. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture

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